

An interview with George A. Gettinger ①

GEORGE A. GETTINGER

An Interview Conducted by

William B. Pickett

June 16, 1981

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NARRATOR DATA SHEET

16 June 1981

DATE

Name of narrator: George A. GettingerAddress: R.R. 2, Sullivan, IN 47882Area 512
Phone: 382-4172Birthdate: March 27, 1906 Birthplace: near Merom, IN

Length of residence in Terre Haute: _____

Education: Grade school in Merom; Union Christian Academy, 9, 10,11, 12. The college closed the year Gettinger graduated from high school, 1924. This also was in Merom.

Occupational history: 1924-25 on farm; 1926 sold Ford autos in Sullivan; 1927-28 Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. in Terre Haute; 1929 Massachusetts Mutual Life Ins. district rep. in Terre Haute; 1932 moved to Sullivan--general insurance agency (& Mass. Mutual) Sullivan County Insurance Agency; Federal Land Bank as an appraiser; Federal Land Bank debt adjustment progress report; 1934-35 secretary-treasurer local Federal Land Bank county organization (ran the office)/organized a new Land Bank Association in Sullivan Co., 1936/; sold real estate /now had full time employee in his insurance and
(see other side)

Special interests, activities, etc. See above. Politics.

Major subject(s) of interview: _____

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Interviewing sessions:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Interviewer</u>
June 16, 1981			William B. Pickett

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Occupational history (continued)

real estate office; 1936 Production Credit district organization--1st representative in Sullivan County; organized Soil Conservation district in 1939 [wanted to be first in the state]--later successful in 1945--[3 townships along the river--other townships petitioned to join later that year]; county clerk, 1938 [completed the reorganization of the county Democrat party] 1940-1944; 1942 defeated for county clerk; purchased grain elevator in Carlisle in 1943; entered partnership in 1939 and bought a hardware store, distributorship for Phillips Petroleum [bought by partnership, undivided half interest]. [1934-1939 worked 18 hours a day selling land]; leased to represent the federal agencies in 1942; sold elevator in 1946; moved to birthplace in 1947 [father dying of cancer, Gettinger had bought 280-acre family farm (always bought land and cows); kept house in Sullivan; moved to present house in 1947; farmer--cattle and sheep, 535 acres; ran for Congress in 1948--lost the nomination to Jim Nolan [ran against the organization]; 1950, elected Democratic County chairman; 1954 county organization wanted Gettinger to run against Bill Bray; 1950 started International Harvester agency in Sullivan; July 1954 it burned down; 1952 carried Democratic county party for Stevenson; 1957 Wabash Valley Association founded in Vincennes [earlier meeting in Mt. Carmel, IL--Roy Dee was founder]; 1959-1965 executive vice president Wabash Valley Assn.; 1965-1968 Indiana office in Washington--federal grants of any kind; 1968-1970, executive vice president National Rivers and Harbors Congress [Washington, D.C.]; 1971-1976 executive director Wabash Valley Interstate Commission with office in Terre Haute.

GEORGE A. GETTINGER

Tape 1

June 16, 1981

Gettenger residence--R.R. 2, Sullivan, Indiana

INTERVIEWER: William B. Pickett

TRANSCRIBER: Kathleen M. Skelly

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WBP:

This is June 16, 1981. I'm William Pickett and I'm speaking with George A. Gettenger at his home on Rural Route 2 in Sullivan, Indiana, near Merom. Rural Route 2, Sullivan, is the post office box number, but the farm is near Merom, Indiana.

Mr. Gettenger was a Metropolitan Life Insurance Company agent in Terre Haute, Indiana, in 1927 and '28.

Mr. Gettenger, what was Terre Haute like in those days? What was your impression of the city?

GETTINGER:

Of course, I was a person 24 years old then. I wasn't so concerned about Terre Haute, what it was like. I was concerned about its opportunity for making a living -- feeding my wife and one boy that I had then. But as I think back, Terre Haute was a friendly town. My debit covered that area from 13th and Poplar down to Hulman Street out east, clear out to Harrison Street and that area and College. And the people that I called on with Metropolitan Insurance Company were good people, fine people working in various kinds of industry around Terre Haute. Of course, the 13th Street area was mostly railroad people, and . . .

WBP:

This was North 13th Street or South 13th?

GETTINGER:

South 13th Street. And we made an awful lot of friends. Cahill's drugstore at that time and Cahill's market was kind of the center of my debit district.

WBP:

When you say "debit" what do you . . .

GETTINGER:

Well, you collected from people, the people who had weekly insurance paid it every two weeks.

GETTINGER: And you called on /them/ every two weeks to collect maybe a dollar and a half, fifty cents, or twenty-cents or five dollars.

WBP: I see.

GETTINGER: And they paid what was known as industrial insurance premiums. I liked Terre Haute. It's always been a mixed city /It/ has various interests and various, different . . . oh, different society barriers. Let's put it like that.

WBP: Explain what you mean.

GETTINGER: Well, all . . . at that time . . . in that period of time when I first went up there, there was . . . well, I collected . . . you may not want to cite this, I don't know, but for instance I collected insurance off of Joe Traum. Joe Traum was one of the known "rum runners" in Terre Haute. And I had no trouble with Joe. I was always treated just perfectly as a gentleman. And his wife always kept the door well chained, you know -- top and a bottom chain on the door.

The Cahill neighborhood was just as fine a Catholic neighborhood as you'd ever find in this world. I mean around 17th and Poplar. Oh, what's the boys' names that runs the filling station /that/ sells Michelin tires? Up on Wabash Avenue . . . their father was living at that time and running the filling station that they now run?

WBP: Was this Atterson?

GETTINGER: No.

WBP: I'm not sure. That's all right.

GETTINGER: Two brothers run the place. And they run the ad about . . .

WBP: Where did you live in Terre Haute?

GETTINGER: We lived at 1717 South 17th Street and we lived at 2701 Harrison Street. And we kind of got out on the edges of the town the second time we moved. /We felt we/ lived too much in town when we lived at 1717.

But I worked an awful lot along Wabash Avenue. Every Saturday afternoon I tried to see who come to town and meet as many people as I could. Carl Wolf's place was the principal clothier in town. Harry Anthony and Joe Pipp were in their middle age and primes at that time.

WBP: Who were they?

GETTINGER: They were salesmen with Carl Wolf's, people who knew a lot of people in town. Ralph Tucker at that time was the "Man on the Street" with WBOW. Terre Haute was kind of a young man's town. It wasn't expensive to live in. That was before the days of inflation. You could still buy six hamburgers for a quarter at the Hill's Snappy Service and for There was the big store down on the corner -- the Hulman Company. It was kind of held in awe by the folks on the street.

There was Tune Brothers in the clothing business. The Root's Store was owned by the original Root family at that time.

And at that age . . . my age, I liked Terre Haute. It seemed to me like you could find about anything in Terre Haute that you were interested in. It had various kinds of circles -- society circles. Social circles, you'd call them today.

WBP: Meaning . . . what are you thinking of when you think of social circles?

GETTINGER: Well, all levels. People can . . . they could go home and play bridge at night, or they could go downtown and play poker if they wanted to.

GETTINGER: Third Street was . . . 3rd and 4th Street were well populated for out-of-town visitors; that was what the red light area was. And the local people let it . . . knew that area was there, but they did nothing about it. They felt like that was people's own business. I'd say Terre Haute has always been a very liberal town. If there's anything it's known for, I'd say the fact that it's been a good neighborhood town. Maybe that's a hard way to put it. It doesn't mean very much . . .

WBP: Is it . . . would you say it's unique, different from other cities in that regard?

GETTINGER: I always felt like it was. You could take your good and the bad and kind of mix it up and you'd come out with a lot better than you had bad.

WBP: Um hmm. But you say neighborhood town. You're saying then there were centers of activity or social centers that were of interest to certain groups of people but perhaps to no one else. It was a conglomerate in that sense.

GETTINGER: That's right! In other words, your railroad people who were working for the railroads all hung out down on Hulman Street and they . . .

WBP: Where Hulman Street crosses the track?

GETTINGER: Yes. And there was a hotel there and a lunch room. And various places like that all over town. Bohemia Club was another place.

WBP: Where was that located?

GETTINGER: It was up in the north end. I don't remember where it was located.

WBP: North end. All right.

GETTINGER: And then the . . . oh, what was the name of the Catholic club they tore down on Ohio Street, uptown like? /Knights of Columbus/ And the Elks Lodge was always a place where people gathered. Business people made lunch places and played cards at the Elks downtown.

No, Terre Haute has always just . . . you could find a place that kind of fit you in the city of Terre Haute. People seemingly were happy and contented with the town. They had their share of the problems. The marketplace where the farm market was was a good cross section of farm people and town people.

WBP: Where was that marketplace located?

GETTINGER: Over between 3rd and 4th . . . 2nd, along in there.

WBP: And was it in the same area as the red light district?

GETTINGER: Below it and north of it.

WBP: Well, the red light district would start where? On Cherry Street? North of Cherry?

GETTINGER: That's right.

WBP: And the market would be located . . .

GETTINGER: North of that.

WBP: North of Cherry? North of the red light district or north of Cherry?

GETTINGER: North of the red light district.

WBP: I see. And so it would be about . . . do you remember what street would border the red light district on the north?

GETTINGER: Oh, I wasn't that familiar with the red light district. I knew very little about it other than everybody kind of knew the boundaries of it. That would have been Cherry Street on the north /south/. And Madam Brown's place was . . . now there are still many people that know . . . remember that location. There've been too many stories done on that. I don't remember exactly where it was, but everybody knew where Madam Brown's place was. And it was kind of a . . . one of the things that you must know in Terre Haute. It was very notorious.

WBP: Were there more houses of prostitution in Terre Haute than other Indiana cities?

GETTINGER: I don't think so, but I think that people in Terre Haute accepted the fact that they were there and talked about it freely, maybe more so than other areas. I'm not a very good authority on red light districts and areas. But every town along the Wabash River, the old river traffic always brought people of this type together for some reason or other. It might not be a red light district, but there were fun-loving people there. I think that's what . . . that's been the thing that's always been along the Wabash that has made it picturesque through the years.

You take Peru or take Logansport, take Lafayette, they all had their red light districts. I expect Peru would never . . . no one ever thought about the red light district there, largely because of the fact that it was a circus city. And the wintering quarters for various circuses. Yet through the years, why . . . I'd say the reason for Terre Haute always being so notorious from the red light was wholly and solely the people who lived there. They were a little different. They were critical, but they accepted the fact the red light district had always been there. I expect that's what happened. In other areas, they didn't talk about it. But Terre Haute was just more free with it.

WBP: Would you say that perhaps . . . let's see. You're talking about Terre Haute as a conglomerate. You could find kind of . . . anybody could come to Terre Haute and find a group of people that he had something in common with. Are these occupation groups that you're thinking of . . . were thinking of or were they economic levels, social status groups, strata, or are they ethnic?

GETTINGER: You had the whole ball of wax. You have your ethnic groups in Terre Haute. You have your social groups built in around the economic factor. You have . . . I think anybody could find what they wanted in Terre Haute.

WBP: All right.

 During the 1920s, of course, this was the period of Prohibition and you talked about Joe Traum. Were there other rum runners, bootleggers who were fairly notorious that you knew of who lived in Terre Haute at the time?

GETTINGER: Well, there was reputedly to be several people occupied in that kind of business at that time. And there was numerous places where you could buy beer if you wanted to buy beer, or you could buy whiskey made in Chicago or whiskey made at Oaktown or Dubois County dew.

WBP: Um hm.

GETTINGER: It was . . . you had to know people to get into them, but they were there. Terre Haute has always had its share of this. But so's every other town that you've known.

WBP: Maybe this isn't true, but I've heard that Terre Haute was -- since it was on U.S. 41 in a line between Miami and Chicago -- that Terre Haute was a place where the gangsters from Chicago might come when things got too hot up there. Is that true?

GETTINGER: I've always heard that same story. And the same . . . it was known as a day's run from Terre Haute to Chicago. They drove that far, and then they rested, just running booze on south. And they'd get to Terre Haute and take it on across the country to Louisville or Cincinnati or wherever they might be going.

WBP: Yeah.

You mentioned the red light district . . . when you first mentioned it, it was a place where transients, or people who were passing through -- salesmen, visitors -- frequented. Was there any indication in your knowledge then that there was organized crime influence in the red light district? Or did you hear about that later?

GETTINGER: We heard about that later. At the same time, it was always an area that if you were trying to rear a decent family and kind of get along, that you drove around. You didn't drive through. If you happened to drive through, why you hurried through, kind of. Now, that was the way it affected me at that early age.

WBP: Yes.

There might be crime there or there might be . . . it was an open . . . it's an area that you might not be protected by law in. Is that . . .

GETTINGER: Yes. And yet as I look back and think about it, I never . . . there was fights down there, I guess. But the police were pretty . . . oh, the police force in Terre Haute has always gotten a lot of yakking about it. But it's always been a pretty good police force. And for it to come down to any big times in some peculiar way . . . it's like the rest of Terre Haute, trying to comment on what made it a likeable city. The same thing's true of the police force. They caught a lot of

GETTINGER: hell, but they done a lot of good. And Terre Haute has just been a town that's raised a lot of hell about the public officials and about the mayors and what-have-you, but not a bad neighborhood. They'd all buy him a cup of coffee the next morning, you know.

WBP: Yes.

Let's talk about politics a little bit. Did you remember Terre Haute being Democratic then? Or were you into politics back in 1927?

GETTINGER: Oh, yes.

WBP: Were you aware of it being a strong Democratic city?

GETTINGER: Oh, yes. The reason for that was we had a student here at Union Christian College that attended school here that worked for Donn Roberts when Donn was mayor and was involved in the vote count. And he got a short sentence out of it. And our family liked this person. And he'd been in our household, and we couldn't understand how he could get involved in this. And yet, he was on the election board and the board was found guilty, and he done a short time in the penitentiary because of vote fraud.

WBP: What was his name?

GETTINGER: I didn't say that.

WBP: Would you Go ahead.

GETTINGER: There might be some of the family still living, you know. In other words, here's a person who came to a Christian college, see. And the vote fraud that was perpetuated at that time in Terre Haute was something that had taken place probably in every county in the state of Indiana. But it be

GETTINGER: come more so involved in Terre Haute because of the personality of Donn Roberts. He was kind of a doer. He was a . . . fightin' the mob! He wasn't one of the people, in reality. He didn't belong, he didn't belong.

WBP: Are you saying that Donn Roberts . . .

GETTINGER: I'm saying that Donn Roberts wasn't a part of the establishment.

WBP: I see. And so things were a lot tougher for him than they would have been for someone who was part of the establishment?

GETTINGER: I'm saying the type of the thing that went on and brought about the conviction of Donn Roberts was the type of a thing that both Democrats and Republicans did all over the state of Indiana with the paper ballot system. I think that's a true statement.

WBP: All right.

Then go ahead and explain . . . I asked you about Democratic politics. Why was the Democratic party so strong in Terre Haute over the years?

GETTINGER: I think because the Democratic party was more mindful of the needs of the people on the precinct level, more concerned with the welfare of the people than the Republican party, more-or-less run by the man who was on the street. And nothing . . . after all, labor was always centered in Terre Haute, and the laboring man even back in those days got better treatment from the Democratic party than they did from the Republican party. And for those reasons, labor played a big part in the early organization of Terre Haute. See, this is the home of Eugene Debs. And Eugene Debs was a smart, good man! And there wasn't any graft in the labor movement at that time. I don't know that there is now, but only

GETTINGER: . . . it was regarded highly by people. And it was honestly concerned about the social welfare of the individual. And all of these things helps to make Terre Haute what we referred to a while ago as a good neighborhood town -- their concern for the person next door.

WBP: There's a concept of the neighborhood grocery store and the neighborhood tavern. It's still in existence in Terre Haute.

GETTINGER: Yes. And it's still a neighborhood tavern. And that's good.

There's enough German influence back there, I think, that just kind of carried over from England and Germany or some place. (laughs)

WBP: What ethnic groups were you most aware of back in '27?

GETTINGER: Oh, the Irish Catholics. In that area.

WBP: They worked where?

GETTINGER: Oh, various things. All over the town. A lot of them came in with the railroads when they came in. And I shouldn't have said "Irish Catholics," but most of them were Catholics. And the German people -- there were several German families around the town. And it's just hard to say which ethnic group was the most influential. I happened to come in contact more with the Irish than the others.

WBP: Um hm.

What group of people . . . the people who were the leaders of society, say . . . the people who were the social elite of Terre Haute back in 1927, were you aware of who those people were? Very much?

GETTINGER: Not much.

WBP: People who lived in big houses on South 6th Street and perhaps the Farrington Grove area? Were you familiar with those circles at all?

GETTINGER: They didn't buy . . . they didn't buy industrial insurance.

WBP: I bet they didn't!

(both laugh)

GETTINGER: And you didn't collect insurance at their houses.

WBP: I guess I'm talking about the social aristocracy, the old families, the moneyed families.

GETTINGER: Of course, the Cahill family was one of the older families and had been in the wholesale liquor business. The Hulman family . . . Tony's operation . . . everyone around was aware of . . . oh, I'd rather not go into that. You can't hardly . . . you can't hardly do that because there's the Filbecks and there's the Royces and . . . we're bound to leave somebody out and somebody in. No, I don't know enough about that to be . . . to cover it.

WBP: O.K.

Did you have the feeling that the people who had positions of economic leadership also participated in politics and were interested in governmental affairs in local politics?

GETTINGER: Oh, I think that's always been true in Terre Haute. More so than any other city this size.

WBP: The people with economic leadership were also interested in politics?

GETTINGER: Yes.

WBP: Can you elaborate on that?

GETTINGER: You can only elaborate on things that you definitely know that you participated in in politics. And I was not involved in politics close enough to Terre Haute -- only as a watcher and a voter -- to be able to elaborate on that kind of a question.

WBP: Are you talking about in the '20s or over the years generally?

GETTINGER: I'm talking about . . . it's always kind of been known that people in Terre Haute were interested in politics. Business people.

WBP: Now, are you talking about politics on the state level or the local city level?

GETTINGER: I'm talking about local city level.

WBP: So, it's just been common . . . rather common knowledge?

GETTINGER: Yes. I believe that's a true statement that the businessmen in Terre Haute realize that politics was a part of his business. And I think Terre Haute's realized that better than most towns have. I think this is one of the things that has made it a good neighborhood town.

WBP: That's interesting because one of the criticisms that is often cast at Terre Haute is that the quality of local government has not been good over the years. You mentioned Donn Roberts, but there've been a number of different political figures in Terre Haute who have been ridiculed or laughed at or criticized. And it seems to be almost indemnific that if you're going to be the mayor of Terre Haute, you're going to be criticized.

WBP: It's almost that bad. Well, why is that then if the economic leadership of the community has also been interested in politics? Ralph Tucker. Everybody seems to like Ralph Tucker, but he still was famous for being the man who served five consecutive terms as mayor of one city and that seemed to be suspect to many people.

But go ahead.

GETTINGER: Well, here again . . . has anyone ever found anything really wrong with Ralph Tucker or anything that he did that would make him a subject to federal prosecution?

WBP: I haven't.

GETTINGER: And I don't think anyone else ever has! Terre Haute was always taking its politics kind of with its tongue in its cheek. The guy that was mayor, they kept him ridin' the horse, you know. They didn't let him have a big automobile.

WBP: They didn't pay their mayors very much.

GETTINGER: Well, no. It was . . . they had to work at the job of being mayor. Your new mayor in Terre Haute. I think Pete /Chalos/ is an example of a person that is just workin' his heart out trying to be a good mayor. And I think Ralph Tucker did the same thing.

I don't recall anyone in Terre Haute that's been mayor in my lifetime that hasn't been a pretty good Joe. It's just a kind of a qualification -- you'd better be a good guy or you don't get to be mayor of Terre Haute. (laughs) I think that's a truism. (continuing laughing)

WBP: Yeah.

GETTINGER: You can't high-hat people and be mayor of

GETTINGER: Terre Haute. There's no way can you do that. You have to work at the job. And they work at it in the political system. I think this is one of the things . . . sure, they like to joke about the mayor. And what was the magazine that come out with Terre Haute being the most corrupt city in the world or something like that?

WBP: Saturday Evening Post.

GETTINGER: Yeah, Saturday Evening Post wrote the story.

WBP: Back in 1961, I believe.

GETTINGER: And yet . . . published in Philadelphia, wasn't it?

WBP: Saturday Evening Post, Curtis Publishing Company.

GETTINGER: Uh-huh. And yet it's been definitely proven that at no time did they ever take a look at the inner circle of the running of the city of Philadelphia -- The Saturday Evening Post. But they come out and jump on a little town like Terre Haute because of the things that you and I are talking about of it being kind of a free, open little town and say everything was corrupt. And yet the percentage of corruption in Terre Haute's never been any greater than it has in any other town, I don't think. There's just a world of good people that live in Terre Haute, Indiana. And if you're down on your luck and havin' a hard time, it's a real friendly town. And I know . . . I think it comes from the fact that . . . oh, it's neither a city nor is it a country town. It's in between. Not big enough to be one of the bigger cities in Indiana and not small enough to be one of the little ones either. (laughs)

WBP: Well, it also has the . . . I don't know,

WBP: maybe the dubious distinction of having gone from /being/ one of the major industrial areas of the state in the late 19th century or early 20th century into being a secondary industrial area and not one of the major Well, it was no longer one of the six major industrial areas. It didn't grow in population. One wonders whether the city fathers were as active as they might have been in seeking new industry, or seeking to bring in . . . to cause the place to grow.

GETTINGER: Well, the same thing is not only true in Terre Haute. The same thing is true at Vincennes. The same thing is true in Sullivan, Indiana. The same thing is true in Clinton, see. And this whole area has been blighted for many, many years because of the lack of agricultural income which has always been the basis of this valley. And if our agricultural income has been good, then our other industries have kind of come in and the cities have bloomed and the jobs have been made available. But whenever you have a flood every four or five years and you take that much out of your total economy, that just works on the whole system.

WBP: I see.

GETTINGER: And I think this has been the reason that this whole area of southern Indiana and southern Illinois has suffered, is the fact that we have never sat down and utilized the Wabash River and used this water for the total good of all the people and managed it like we should. We've depended on rail and we've depended on trucks. But the towns that's really done good have been the towns that's had water transportation along with rail and along with truck systems. Take the towns along the Ohio River or the railroads along the Ohio River, the only ones in the black in America in the last ten years. The road that runs along the Ohio River competes with the barge traffic /and/ competes with the truck traffic. But here we've always been limited with

GETTINGER: rail and with trucks. And we've never seen fit to spend the necessary money to develop the navigation along the river.

WBP: Are there people in Terre Haute who understood that?

GETTINGER: Oh, yes. There's people in Terre Haute that understood it. But I know what you're talking about is the fact that taking that leadership and going out and becoming the first and really hanging in there. No, we haven't had too much of that. We've had folks who wanted to help. Look at the effort Maynard Wheeler made and how much he gave in the latter part of his life! And you've had numerous people that you could name. You make a mistake in naming any name, because you always miss another dozen folks that helped, you know. There's Forrest Sherer and Tony Hulman, Joe Quinn. You could go on and name and name and name people in Terre Haute that wish you well in the Wabash Valley Association but were busy with other things, see.

WBP: Um hm.

GETTINGER: See, our Wabash Valley Association organization in Terre Haute started with farm people who were interested wholly and solely in flood control. And we had a hard time breaking into Wabash Avenue. That spark . . . you had membership if the folks'd go in the store and collect it. But as far as taking the time back in those days -- in the '60s I'm talking about -- they were hard to find. Terre Haute wasn't one of the real pushers but neither was Vincennes! The people who pushed was those people who were gettin' hurt out in that river bottom there from flood losses!

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: That was pullin' down the whole economy of

GETTINGER: this area, in my opinion. And I don't think anybody can run any business and every third or fourth, fifth year have a total loss. There's just no way for you to ever get too far ahead. And unless your citizenship all get ahead, none of you'll get ahead!

WBP: You were talking about Wabash Avenue. Were the people . . . is it your feeling that the people of Terre Haute -- again the economic leaders or the people who had clout -- were they basically interested in what . . . maybe perhaps /they were/ satisfied? They thought that they were doing well enough? If they were prospering, they were prospering well enough and /felt/ that they did not need to get on another band wagon? I don't want to put words in your mouth, I'm (laughs) trying to be careful, but I'm trying to understand exactly . . . get at the source of the attitudes of people in terms of economic development. Maybe they thought they were satisfied with what they had, that if they brought in new industry or they made Terre Haute prosper more as a result of perhaps through altering the Wabash River, that they would lose something that was valuable to them that they already had?

GETTINGER. Of course, what you've asked me now is the Chamber of Commerce question. Every Chamber secretary is involved in that same . . . how do you motivate a city and cause it to move along? And how do you get that little extra that every man is capable of giving to bring about an economic development that fits the whole society living in the area? I don't know. I wasn't able to do it. And God knows I tried. And the time was fairly right, but other people had been working for a hundred years on the same thing that we were concerned with in the navigation of the Wabash River. And the Wabash Valley Association was organized, as we've said, in '57. And here we was bucking the Tennessee Tom Bigbee area, that had the support

GETTINGER: of four governors actively in that area, that had an organization actively for a hundred years since they started trying to get the Tennessee Tom Bigbee built across the Tennessee River.

The same thing had been true with the Ohio Valley Association. They maintained their active organization in Cincinnati all up and down the Ohio River 72 years, I believe. And why were those people interested? And how'd you keep their interest? And how do you get this kind of a job done? We made a lot of headway. See, we didn't have enough water in the Wabash River for navigation when we started. And in fact, navigation wasn't really the reason it started. But a flood control problem, polluted water, dirty water in the Wabash River. They needed a sanitary system in Terre Haute, Indiana. And you put it off for years, doing it, see. And yet today, you're catching bass just a mile-and-a-half down south of your town, that I know of. A person here a while back stopped me and told me that he had caught a, I think, a three-pound bass down there just within a mile-and-a-half (laughs) of . . . and bass is something that don't live in dirty water, see.

WBP: Yes. So it's worked?

GETTINGER: Oh, my goodness! The Wabash River, if they'd publicize it today, it's one of the cleanest rivers in all of the Midwest! And don't let anybody kid you about it! We've never had anybody that's talked about the good of our waters. We all talk about the bad river.

WBP: Did the Wabash Valley Association accomplish that?

GETTINGER: I'd say, yes. We could take more credit for that than any other living organization. And we come into that door through the movement of soil.

GETTINGER: Farm people were the last people on earth, you know, to think about removing dead stuff out of streams. Because that flood area, it was all during the . . . a part of the early river system was a sewage disposal plant. They never thought anything about throwing a hog in the river just 'cause he was dead, you know. And that was one of the things; that's what the river was supposed to do.

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: That was the purpose in the beginning. And the same way with open sewage. We done a lot to turn that around, the Wabash Valley Association. We were the first people that dared to testify in Washington before the House committee. The need of cleaning it up. And the need of having good, clear, clean useable water.

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: And the value of what it would mean in the future as well as what it meant today. And I . . .

WBP: How did you get Terre Haute to put in a better sewage disposal system?

GETTINGER: Well, sir, Ralph Tucker was involved in that. Federal grants made it easier for him to do it. But Ralph understood real well about what the city would stand and what they could stand. And he had been involved working on that in a non-political-like manner for several years, knowing they shouldn't be dumping raw sewage in the river. I talked to him about it back in those days in the early days of the Wabash Valley Association, and he said, "And we're not making the river any cleaner, but some of these days we'll get it done." And some of these days, he did get it done.

WBP. I see.

GETTINGER: And . . .

WBP: That deserves to be said. It's something he accomplished there.

GETTINGER: Oh, my goodness gracious! Ralph Tucker done a lot of things for Terre Haute, for the people of this valley. Well, I'll tell you one thing about Ralph. Real early in the history of the Wabash Valley Association I was having a very crucible meeting down at Lawrenceville, Illinois. And I had to have somebody who would come in there who would kind of rev it up. Numerous towns had kind of gone sour. We wasn't gettin' it done fast enough. Nothing was being accomplished in the Wabash Valley Association.

And I called Ralph on the telephone. I said, "Ralph, I need just an old spellbinding, old-fashioned Baptist minister's sermon preached down here at Lawrenceville at the Elks Club to about a hundred people. And they'll all be public officials of towns in Illinois and Indiana stretched out on both sides of the river, and most of them will be from Vincennes on south. Would you come down and make a speech for me and talk about what could be done with the Wabash River and how we'd all benefit?"

And he said, "For you I'll do that."

And I think it was one of the finest speeches ever made about the future of the Wabash Valley and what it would mean if the waters was cleaned up as the boat whistles blew and made Terre Haute the Queen city of the whole Midwest." (laughs wholeheartedly) . . .

WBP: He used that phrase?

GETTINGER: Yes.

Yes, that's the first time I ever heard it used -- Queen City.

WBP: That would later be on the sign out at the airport -- "Queen City of the Wabash."

GETTINGER: But he used it down in Lawrenceville back in '62 and in that speech. And it did go over and it wasn't accepted then.

WBP: But you know he was president or executive director of the Chamber of Commerce after he went out of being mayor and some people again . . . the city didn't grow while he was mayor and didn't grow after he was at the Chamber of Commerce either, but he no doubt accomplished some things that people don't give him credit for.

GETTINGER: Oh, I don't . . . I think Ralph is one of those people that goes through life making his way each and every day . . . some people liking him, some people disliking him. But never anybody stopping and thinking, "Well, what honestly's the guy done?" I think there are a lot of people /that/ fit into this category and live their entire lifetime in a community, have certain positions they occupy. But nobody ever gives a thought, what kind of a guy would you have there if he wasn't there?

WBP: Um hm.

GETTINGER: I think Ralph has been a victim of more criticism than he has been a desirous . . .

WBP: Ralph, in other words, was pretty much what the people wanted or they wouldn't have elected him year after year?

GETTINGER: That's right.

WBP: He was also an interesting example of the dominance of one party, though, for a lot of years.

GETTINGER: Yes, but you found in that party you found almost as many business Republicans supporting Ralph Tucker as you did business Democrats, didn't you?

END OF SIDE 1

TAPE 1-SIDE 2

GETTINGER: Ralph was never supposed to be mayor of Terre Haute. Ralph came from down at Hymera and . . . a very humble beginning. /He/ wasn't blessed with a college education. The family was very, very poor. Yet Ralph had one of the sharpest, quickest minds around, you know. And he didn't fit when you got him out of kind of the (laughs) . . . what would you say? The middle class picture of society? He wasn't supposed to be up here. More of us spent time trying to kick these kind of people down, you know, than you did promoting them. And he dressed well. He wore his clothes well. Consequently he was envied by men and respected by women and so forth, and everybody classified him accordingly. Yet nobody ever proved too much.

WBP: Nobody ever approved of him?

GETTINGER: Huh?

WBP: Nobody ever did what too much?

GETTINGER: I said no one ever found him too guilty of doing any more running around than anyone else.

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: And I think it was just one of those things that he happened to be around and he was sharp enough - or smart enough, whatever you want -- to kind of put the various groups together to get himself elected the first time. And then he . . .

GETTINGER: well, Ralph Tucker knew Terre Haute. He spent his time with Terre Haute. He was about the best person . . . Terre Hautean that they had. And I'd say that's why he was elected five terms.

When somebody would get mad at him, you know, he'd find somebody that that man had been mad at /and/ would get with him. (laughs)

WBP: Would you say he was a . . . he must have kept the political party apparatus intact and kept them satisfied with his performance.

GETTINGER: He believed to the victor belong the spoils, you know. And you'd be surprised how many people in America today would like to go back to the old system.

WBP: He rewarded his supporters?

GETTINGER: He rewarded them. And got work out of them. He had . . .

WBP: Did he have a vision for what Terre Haute could be? When you said a minute ago that you called him and invited him down to give a talk and asked him to put together a talk, he made a beautiful speech. But you did not tell me that he really believed in the development of the Wabash Valley. You told me that he came down to give a speech.

Now, maybe I've . . .

GETTINGER: That's an awful good question. How many people in public life today can you honestly say believe with their sincerity and their honesty? You know, we're not guilty of accepting bribes in government here to a great extent in our country as they are in foreign countries. But I think we are guilty of -- in public life or in business --

GETTINGER: of kind of living a life of going with it, because that's the way it's going, Mac. And you don't gain anything by being against it. And I think if we have a crime today, it's the fact that we go along with people that /we/ absolutely know they're wrong. But /we do it/ rather than creating their dislike or causing them to feel that you disagree with them.

I think there's more of a tendency among everybody, not just in politics but in the school-teaching profession. /You/ used to depend on schoolteachers going out and taking the lead, you know, and developing things. Almost classified right along with the ministry. But today your schoolteachers especially . . . I'll bet at Rose . . . I'll bet you haven't got five people out there that's really active in the whole . . .

What happens to the valley? See. Or what happens to Terre Haute? You got a lot of lip service. Everybody claps their hands and hollers hooray, but when . . . if they had to go and put up a tent, you wouldn't find five guys to pull down . . . drive the stakes. (laughs) I think we're guilty of this.

WBP: (laughs)

GETTINGER: I'm not saying this about Rose or any . . . Terre Haute, Indiana State or anyplace else. But I think we've . . .

WBP: Forrest Sherer and Tony Hulman both, no doubt, supported the Tucker administration, didn't they?

GETTINGER: Oh, Harry Adams and . . . right up and down Main Street.

WBP: And, again you said Tucker knew Terre Haute.

WBP: He reflected what Terre Haute was thinking or wanted.

GETTINGER: I hope you don't use that publicly, that I said Forrest Sherer. I know that he did. But Martha that married Jack is Forrest Sherer's daughter. I wouldn't know whether Forrest Sherer would like that or not.

WBP: Martha?

GETTINGER: Martha Gettinger. Jack's wife.

WBP: I see.

GETTINGER: She's Forrest Sherer's daughter. And sometimes they're a little touchy about this or that. But I personally know that Forrest Sherer got along with Ralph Tucker. And I know the last time that he supported Ralph Tucker.

And how do I know? Because he told me himself. Forrest Sherer was a registered Republican and always was all his life.

WBP: He was an important force in Terre Haute for good, Forrest Sherer, wasn't he?

GETTINGER: Yes. Yes. He wanted to do. He wanted to do.

WBP: Did he like to stay behind the scenes?

GETTINGER: Oh . . . yet he coveted very much recognition, too. This is . . . like Tony. Tony wanted to stay behind the scenes, and he was a master at this. How do you know what motivates guys like this? See, they're just like you and I. And they'll spend their money to get recognized because of money donations and yet at the same time hide behind a great smoke of "don't tell anybody."
(laughs) And you've seen that operate, but they

GETTINGER: like to see it in headlines. Tony Hulman would go this way. I think Forrest Sherer directed it this way. Forrest Sherer also was very much . . . he was a smart salesman. He knew what boards he could get on that would influence insurance sales and all of these kind of things. I wouldn't know, but I bet 20 dollars against a five-dollar bill that he's got the insurance for Rose-Hulman Institute.

WBP: He's done well. I mean, the Historical Society has . . . he's insured buildings there. That agency is flexible, and they know what kind of policy to write and you know, it satisfies customers. But he was on the board at both places.

GETTINGER: He told you he knew what to write.

WBP: (laughs)

GETTINGER: Didn't he? (laughs)

I'm not trying to detract from Forrest's knowledge of the insurance business.

WBP: Well, that's . . . I mean I don't think there is anything unAmerican about helping the community at the same time you help yourself. I mean that's all-American, in fact. That's what this nation's been built on. But . . .

GETTINGER: The hell of it is . . . that's a true statement you just got through making. But has it really been good for it?

WBP: Well, I wonder. I'd like to get a little . . . go a little further now into Terre Haute's history.

What are the most important changes you've seen in the city during your lifetime? In its . . .

WBP: whatever. I don't want to give you any hints, because I want you to decide what you feel are the most important changes.

GETTINGER: I expect the biggest thing that has happened in recent years has been electing Pete Chalos mayor.

WBP: Really?

GETTINGER: Because he's a different type. He's a different kind of person from what's been there. And I don't know what I mean by that. But I have a feeling he's going to be an outstanding personality. Maybe not a great mayor, but I think he'll bring together working forces that have been kind of on the outside and that he will kind of build up the confidence of the people in the political system. But that's the way I feel about Pete. I may be wrong. I'm taking an awful long shot to project . . . even prophesy what a guy'll do. But so far, watching his administration from 30 miles away, I feel that he's the same guy today that was running for mayor. I don't know . . . I don't know what makes one town move. But it's just that little extra something that a person's willing to give to it that we haven't been able to get involved in this part of the southern Indiana or up and down the west side of Indiana.

WBP: Part of what we're talking about today is the presence or absence of vision. Would you say that Pete has a kind of vision for what Terre Haute could be that perhaps the other mayors did not have? And also has a reputation which is beyond dispute so that he might be able to accomplish it?

GETTINGER: And go one other step farther. Basically, I think he was a good schoolteacher. And in order to be a good schoolteacher, you have to be concerned

GETTINGER: about what becomes of that boy or that girl you're teaching and trying honestly to push it hard enough to get the maximum amount of good out of that person. I think he's afflicted by wanting to do good. And I know him so slightly that I'm not really qualified to say that. But the few times that I had the pleasure of being with him and watching him in TV appearances, I haven't detected any kind of a thing preventing him from being mayor. I haven't found anything but an honest desire to do the best day's work he can do. And if a man will apply himself to any kind of a job, it will make the whole area better.

WBP: You're saying then that you don't feel that he will be eaten by the system that's already there that has perhaps corrupted others? The system that exists in any kind of political . . .

GETTINGER: Well.

WBP: . . . organization.

GETTINGER: No. Well, you see, I don't exactly buy the fact that the system in Terre Haute has been any more corrupt than any other area. Indianapolis, for instance, or Lake . . . Gary or anyplace . . .

WBP: Would you say it's been any less corrupt?

GETTINGER: Oh, I think so. I think there are other areas . . .

(interruption)

GETTINGER: I don't think it'd hold a candle to them. (laughs) In reality. I think Terre Haute's been pretty lucky from the standpoint of not having any great big scandals that's broke loose there. Now, you know the way they've rode Terre Haute and watched Terre Haute through the years that if

GETTINGER: there'd been anything very bad there, they'd a had investigators in there. Look at the times they have had!

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: See?

WBP: What about the downtown? The downtown has changed since you were there in 1927. Let's go back to 1927 for a minute. Did you . . . when you were there then, did you have a sense that things were growing, that things were . . . there was an air of prosperity about the place?

GETTINGER: Well, of course, I thought there was at that phase in 1927. I had a feeling that Terre Haute was . . . oh, it was a good . . . when business was good there before the Depression started taking hold, it was a buying town, yes. And I felt that way about it. But you must remember, a person 26 years old or 27 that's doing fairly well himself, ho, every morning you get up, the sky is rosy. And you go out and you do a day's work and you come home without any tears in your eyes. The next day's the same way, and that was the life I lived when I was in Terre Haute. You had to work like the dickens.

WBP: Was there a . . . in the downtown, was it congested? Did you feel there were large crowds of people that you had to deal with?

GETTINGER: On Saturday afternoon you had the farm people come in, and the people from the smaller towns around come into Terre Haute. And there was a congestion in 1927 on the main street of downtown Terre Haute. Yes.

WBP: Would you go to vaudeville or movies or plays?

GETTINGER: Well, you see the movie houses were in decline back in those days. And just at the time sound was coming in and so forth.

WBP: The Terre Haute House was under construction when you came, right?

GETTINGER: Indiana Theater.

WBP: Indiana Theater.

GETTINGER: And the Grand and the Terre Haute House was built . . .

WBP: /Nineteen hundred/ twenty-eight, I believe is the . . .

GETTINGER: All right. But now it was . . . now I don't recall too much about the Terre Haute House. Now isn't that interesting?

WBP. Um hm.

GETTINGER: And I was very much aware of the Deming.

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: Oh, no! No, the Terre Haute House was there in '24.

WBP: Well, sure, the Terre Haute House was, but I'm talking about this . . .

GETTINGER: The new hotel?

WBP: The new hotel.

GETTINGER: Uh-huh. Yeah.

WBP: They tore the old one down and built a new one right . . .

GETTINGER: Right by it, didn't they?

WBP: Right in the same place. Tore the old one down and built a new building. 1928 I believe is the Roman numeral which is on it. It's now standing vacant.

GETTINGER: I thought they'd transferred that over to the federal government for a . . . not a low /income/ housing but kind of a medium housing operation.

WBP: Well . . .

GETTINGER: Didn't they try to do that?

WBP: As far as I know, they tried but the deal . . . as far as I know, the deal has not finished. It never went through, and I don't know what the status of it is at this moment. But it's empty.

GETTINGER: Hmf. Well, I thought that had gone through.

WBP: All right.

Now, the downtown, of course, is much different now. It's just . . . the whole tempo of life is different. The buildings are . . . many buildings simply aren't there. What caused that?

GETTINGER. Shopping center.

WBP: When was the shopping center negotiated? Was that during Tucker's administration?

GETTINGER: Well, you see they first built Meadows shopping center, out east. And . . .

WBP: It was in the '50s, right?

GETTINGER: Then they built this one down on South 7th Street. And then these people came in and put

GETTINGER: together this big deal down in . . . south.

I think this was a national trend. I don't know whether the towns could offset the fact that they didn't have parking uptown to take care of the trade or not. The idea of a shopping center is to bring together businesses of kindred relationship so that all of their customers get under one roof. And I think the American people wanted that. I think they'd been traipsed up and down this block and that block and without any stop. The adage used to be in business, get away from your competitor. Don't get next to him. And that was kind of a . . . it wasn't a philosophy of knowing him; it was kind of a philosophy of being really a competitor in every sense of the word. It looks like now, we're going the other way -- where you sleep with the guy who is in competition with you and you price with him and the whole works, you know. The only difference you have really is between your trade potentials and not the few articles that they have on sale.

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: The rest of the stock of goods is just about the same. And this is the new system. And I think shopping centers are the greatest places on earth for this. And I think the enterprising, hardcracking guy that wants business used to go out there and open up the store at 7 o'clock in the morning and run his own shop. Before the days of the trade unions, see, he could work 12 hours or not if he wanted to, and he made money. I suppose we're talking about what? Nineteen hundred and ten?

WBP: Yes, maybe so.

GETTINGER. And now through this last 70 years, we've moved to the place where it's nice to come down

GETTINGER: about 10 o'clock in the morning after all the hired help is there, and move on back into a nice office, sit down in a nice chair, make two or three telephone calls and then go to an early lunch and not get back until 3 o'clock and run the business. Because that's the way Joe does it.

WBP: Um hm.

GETTINGER: And we're in that . . . we were in that pattern.

I had an unusual experience the other day. We had some mosquitoes here and mama was sitting out on the patio and she said, "You know what? Sears & Roebuck has got a mosquito light for sale. And if we had one, it would make life so much more enjoyable for us."

"Well," I said, "let's go look at it."

So we drove to Terre Haute to look at the mosquito light. "Bug Whacker" is what it's called.

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: And Sears and Roebuck had them and they was on display, but they had sold everything but the display. But the person who waited on us came rather suddenly after we arrived in the store, which is unusual for Sears or anyplace else in this new marketing system of sales people. Not just Sears, but anyplace else . . . lack of people, personnel to help you with your purchases, I think it's the crime of modern-day business. (laughs) But this person said . . . wanted to show us this bug whacker. And we looked at it, and she was a very pleasant young lady, 22 or '3 or '4, something like that. And /she/ said, "We have sold out, but we will have some in the first of the week." (This was after Mrs. Gettinger

GETTINGER: expressed a desire to buy.) "And we'll call you if and when they come in."

And, lo and behold, on Monday -- I think that was on a Wednesday or Thursday we were in -- the lady called and said that the machine was in.

So, I went up to get it and this time was kind of met by the manager of that department who was glad to get the machine for me, glad for me to give him a hundred-dollar bill. And on top of that, because of my crippled arm, he carried it out and put it in my car in the parking lot!

Now, there's something happened in the Sears & Roebuck system. Because I say to you, a year ago that couldn't have happened!

WBP: I see.

GETTINGER: That just couldn't have happened. Now this happened in their store in Terre Haute.

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: Now whether that is universal or not . . . I had almost a similar circumstance at Montgomery Ward. I've always been treated unusually nice at Meis's, as far as clerks are concerned. But there was a period in the last four or five years that if you were the customer, you was going to make work.

WBP: Yes.

Then you're saying that the shopping mall . . . the development of the shopping mall was bound to happen. It was a nation-wide trend. Terre Haute couldn't . . . should not have tried to avoid that trend. Terre Haute was mainly a retail commercial center by the what? The 1940s? As railroads and coal mines dropped off, the main

WBP: economic activity was retailing. And now it was a matter of doing what the rest of the nation did. Is that basically what you're saying?

GETTINGER: Yes. Well, I don't think anybody in Terre Haute honestly realized that this was a national trend along with it. I don't think they did in Indianapolis either, or Columbus, Ohio. I think the businessmen in this city just kind of sat by and looked at the monster come. And the enterprising real estate man that was putting it together.

WBP: Yes. There was no planning for this; it was just something that happened.

GETTINGER: We was ready for it!

WBP: It just occurred.

GETTINGER: I'd hate to just say that was any mayor's fault.

WBP: Yeah. Well, even if . . . maybe we wouldn't want to say fault anyway. Maybe we'd want to say he deserves credit for it happening during his administration. But in any case, it did happen outside the city limits though.

GETTINGER: Yes, and it did happen in a spot that I don't know of one anywhere -- shopping center -- that has as many cars or it looks like it has as much trade as that shopping center does in Terre Haute, Indiana.

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: I don't understand why it is as prosperous as it is. But you just look at shopping centers. Indianapolis, any one you want to, and I'll bet you two bucks to one that you'll find more people

GETTINGER: in Terre Haute than you will there. (laughs)

WBP: O.K.

GETTINGER: And there's something about that shopping center in Terre Haute that extends itself clear to Effingham and clear on up to Danville and clear on . . . I expect, from Indianapolis people. (laughs)

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: There's something about it that's unusual and unique.

WBP: The automobile age then really . . . it made it possible for shopping centers to exist and shopping centers meant more convenient shopping for the American people. And so it's technology in part which has brought about this . . .

GETTINGER: That was really the biggest reason. And the fact that the downtown areas didn't have a place to park that automobile.

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: Parking meters was not the solution to the overall evil.

WBP: Do you know anything else about the downtown economy that made it attractive to move outside the city limits?

GETTINGER: Oh, I expect you could say that the very fact that the buildings that were downtown had been there a long, long time. The families who owned them were not always concerned about how well it was kept up. Terre Haute, after all, is not a young town. Some of those buildings had been built back 75 and a hundred years ago. And the

GETTINGER: families -- the grandfather or great grandfather -- had passed on. Only those that went ahead and spent their money and went broke were the only ones that had new ownership. So you didn't have an aggressive owner of your downtown section. In reality, the man that wasn't hungry for rent; he had big money. And I think this probably . . . if there was any curse that you had in Terre Haute, I think this is the fact that you had an awful lot of absentee landowners who owned businesses built in Terre Haute and . . .

WBP: Lived where?

GETTINGER: Oh, in Cleveland or New York City.

WBP: Really?

GETTINGER: Or Miami . . . I'm just picking them out of the air.

WBP: Um hm.

GETTINGER: Just like every town that . . . Bloomington.

WBP: So, they didn't take an interest in the downtown because they didn't live there. All they were interested in was the rent that came in?

GETTINGER: Um hmm. I think Terre Haute had more than its share of this.

After all when they pulled the railroad shops, the coal mines all went down, see. And then you come along and you had an extra boom, and you're the largest truck city in the country. There were more national truck organizations in Terre Haute -- truck owners and so forth -- than almost any other city of its size.

WBP: Is that right? When was this?

GETTINGER: Oh, this is all through that period back
. . . 1950 and '60.

WBP: I see. I didn't know that.

GETTINGER: Oh, yeah. You had this big, massive owner-
ship of truck terminals here.

WBP: I see.

GETTINGER: And . . .

WBP: Located out at the old army . . . the Tumpane
military depot out there? After the war, you mean?
Is that where most of them were?

GETTINGER: Well, there were some out there, but they
were located all over town, on South 3rd . . .
North 3rd Street and out on Wabash Avenue. Harry
Adams used to be involved in one, the Pontiac
dealer. And I think Forrest Sherer was the largest
insurer . . . largest insurer of trucks and lia-
bility insurance in the whole Midwest.

WBP: Is that right? Hmm.

GETTINGER: Lloyd's of London sent representatives over
here, and he sent his man over there and so on
and so forth because the amount of the liability
involved was so high.

WBP: So the location . . . Terre Haute's location
made a difference, was an important asset.

GETTINGER: You see that is something we have never
capitalized on. Here Terre Haute is obviously
the center of the whole Midwest structure. It
isn't Chicago. Chicago is in the northeast. But
here's Terre Haute with water that you could have
inland transportation on, setting with the whole
area around it. Well, you'd go north to the Great
Lakes, and then you're an overnight drive to . . .

GETTINGER: three or four hours out of St. Louis, see. The same distance to Chicago, Cincinnati, Louisville. And that's why those trucks was there. Because it was central. But it's never . . . it never has milked its potential or possibility. Terre Haute had a great future, if they'd just get off their duff and somebody would clap their hands and say, boys, let's go and everybody'd fall in line.

It's possible. It'll come eventually. When you get navigation on that river and you get so you've got freight rates and you can honestly compete, it'll be the center of this whole operation. Not Indianapolis. And I don't want to compete with Indianapolis. But Indianapolis will never have a transportation system by water. It'll never have it.

The only thing that's holding up St. Louis is the fact that there's that Mississippi River and all that northwest grain moving by it. And all that transportation, that's potential, possible. Here we sit on the largest coal reserves there are in the world, see -- enough to take care of this country for the next 200 years without a transportation system to move it! How many businessmen are clapping their hands and hollering, boys, let's get out there and get that done? This is necessary not only to my business but to your business and everybody else's business.

WBP: That's good old-fashioned booster spirit.

GETTINGER: Yes. Oh, yes!

WBP: Booster spirit. My interest is tied to your interest and we're all in it together and let's move. But that doesn't seem . . . I just . . . I don't see that.

GETTINGER: It's not here any more.

WBP: Well, I don't see that in Terre Haute. I just . . . I guess a Forrest Sherer could . . . I mean you keep talking about . . . we keep coming back to it. He clearly had that attitude toward his own business. And at one time Tony Hulman sold Clabber Girl baking powder all over this nation with billboard advertising. Did he not?

GETTINGER: Oh, better than that! Little billboard deal. He sent people into every state with Clabber Girl signs and they'd stick them up at the cross roads.

WBP: Well, he clearly . . .

GETTINGER: And it worked.

WBP: Both those gentlemen had the entrepreneurial spirit, at one time in their life, at least. And certainly as it related to their own personal company. But the question is, did they have it as related to Terre Haute and to their community? I'm not sure. I wonder.

GETTINGER: Well, do you think . . .

WBP: There's some . . .

GETTINGER: . . . the man emerged in front of this community?

WBP: What? Excuse me.

GETTINGER: That man emerged and not the community?

WBP: Maybe. I don't know. Tony Hulman really put Indianapolis on the map with that Speedway. (laughs) I mean, in part. That helped. Every Memorial Day Indianapolis went around the world on the radio.

GETTINGER: And yet he had to fight City Hall to get them to understand that was valuable to them.

WBP: In Indianapolis?

GETTINGER: Yes. He had a lot of trouble with the police force to get cooperation to take care of the crowd when it first started there.

WBP: Yeah.

GETTINGER: And I think he had been used to having in Terre Haute full cooperation of the county officials and the city officials in anything ever he wanted to do. I think this shocked him to find the fact that Indianapolis didn't understand.

WBP: I see. Then what you're saying though is that it's possible he did not really want to make Terre Haute much different than it was.

GETTINGER: I'm not so sure . . . I'm not so sure maybe that isn't the reason why Terre Haute is as quiet as it is or has been. Really, I'm not so sure. They never made much room for any industrious sort of a person.

(interruption)

WBP: O.K. Go ahead. What were you saying?

GETTINGER: I'm not so sure that Terre Haute has made that kind of a person welcome. I'm not so sure that Sullivan, Indiana, has either. I'm not so sure that this whole section of the old coal mine, railroad boom days, the 1912s, isn't still looking back. I think this has stayed with us.

See, the Teapot Dome hit this valley awful hard back in the Harding administration. And the bank failures hit the valley awful hard. And we
. . .

WBP: Of the 1920s, you're talking about?

GETTINGER: Yes. Yes. And the Depression was really worse in the coal mine fields here than it was elsewhere. And we were the very heart of that. Take Sullivan County. We was number 2 in relief people, populationwise. Vermillion County, Clinton was number 1. I think Vigo was about 5th or 6th. It takes you a long, long time where your people have suffered as they've suffered. And then take what the river . . . the flooding of the river has cost the area. I think this is just one of the natural things that comes on us. See, it always comes back to that river. It has ever since the beginning of time.

WBP: Let's go back to the downtown again. I keep wanting to . . . dragging you back.

Do you know anything about the tax rates in downtown Terre Haute?

GETTINGER: No.

WBP: They're high. Right now they're ten times as high as they are out . . . outside the city limits.

GETTINGER: You see, almost anything that's good happens, there's always a key person someplace along that line that believed in it. And then it branches out and becomes other people's ideas. And the folks who are seeking glory and honor and name recognition join because they think this will do them good. And it's awful hard to take anything as big as the real development of the waters of the Wabash River for one person to ever take the glory and the credit for accomplishing it. A governor might. If a governor was really sincere and concerned in Illinois and Indiana with doing something for this part of the states of Indiana

GETTINGER: and Illinois and was really concerned about bringing jobs to the area, wanted to develop the coal resources . . . see there are just as many tons of coal on the west side of this Wabash River as there is on the east side of it. And if the governor of the two states would decide they wanted to bring jobs into this area, every one of these mines will produce a million and a half tons a year /and/ would use 800 men at the mine. And the wages . . . how else can they bring industry that will employ as many people and get as many people jobs as water making it possible for transportation to take that coal to market? And some of these days we're going to have somebody come along that's that smart, that wants to do something honestly, not to blaze his name in lights, but just because he wants to do something for the area for the people that has seen fit to elect him governor. And then it'll happen. And then if we've got mayors in Terre Haute and mayors in Vincennes and mayors in Lawrenceville and Carmi and Fairfield and Effingham that want to do something for their own people locally, they'll all join together in a band and they'll go to Washington and they'll come home with the money.

WBP: Would you say that one of the problems perhaps over the years with this particular issue has been the fact that Illinois and Indiana did not work together? That they have separate interests that . . . it's an artificial . . . almost an artificial political boundary which has then separated the two -- divided something that should be a common interest?

GETTINGER: Oh, I don't think Chicago has ever realized just how important . . . just like Indianapolis doesn't realize how important it is that Terre Haute do well. I don't think Chicago has ever realized how important it is to them that southern Illinois do better. If they could realize how

GETTINGER: much that would mean that the whole area was blooming with prosperity and what would happen to their little ol' town of Chicago by bringing this kind of new money and new finance and new jobs into the valley. Hell's fire, they'd be the biggest boosters!

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: Now, Mayor [Richard J.] Daley sat down one time and talked about it, see. And he was just . . . if times had been just a little bit different . . . if he hadn't had so many problems in Chicago, we could have had his wholehearted support on making this . . . the Wabash River in Illinois navigable, see. And hoping and praying sometime he could bring it on up to Lake Michigan, see.

WBP: Yeah.

GETTINGER: See, this would give them about a 95% shipping date from Lake Michigan clear out to the ocean, see.

WBP: It sounds like the dream of the builders of the Wabash & Erie canal.

GETTINGER: No. You see that's been one of the things that people reflect it back to. That has hurt so much because that was in an era that changed. The railroads come along and eliminated practically all the hand-built water vehicles. The people who dreamed about the Wabash-Erie canal were not the people who were involved in building it. It got in the hands of promoters, you know. And they sold bonds and they just damned near wrecked this ol' state of ours.

WBP: Yeah.

GETTINGER: And that has hurt because of the things that cause so much heartaches so many years ago. Because the idea was not practical with the railroad competition that was involved. And they did not build up their water reserves in the farmer reservoirs to have local water sufficient to take care of any traffic to speak of. And they wasn't expecting the expansion of population and the growth.

Just like your shopping centers on Main Street. The shopping centers just done the same way to Main Street as the railroads did to the Erie Canal. It was just . . . their timing was wrong. It was going to happen anyway.

WBP: You were working in Washington, D.C., attempting to get federal grants for the state of Indiana. Were there any federal grants which affected the Wabash Valley area or the Terre Haute area during this time? That perhaps weren't initiated by local officials or weren't supported by local officials?

GETTINGER: My, goodness gracious! That whole building complex of Indiana State and your buildings out there on the campus, all had federal grants.

WBP: All right.

GETTINGER: Universities in every town . . .

WBP: This is in the mid 1960s you're talking about?

GETTINGER: Nineteen /hundred/ sixty-three, -four. I mean, '65, '66, '67.

WBP: So that kind of money went into Terre Haute in the universities -- colleges and universities -- during this period?

GETTINGER: Vincennes University used an awful . . . well,

GETTINGER: I'll tell you. We talk about our great college system, you know, and our state universities. If it hadn't been for the federal grant system, the Indiana taxpayers never could have built the buildings out there. (laughs)

WBP: Yes.

I just read an interview with Ewing Miller yesterday. Ewing Miller, the architect. He benefited indirectly from those grants, I guess. He did most of those buildings.

GETTINGER: Those people, I mean of his occupation, would honestly have starved if it hadn't been for the federal grant system.

WBP: Did Terre Haute actively pursue federal grants during the time you were in Washington as other cities did?

GETTINGER: Oh, I think it was more active.

WBP: They were more active. Uh-huh.

END OF TAPE 1

TAPE 2-SIDE 1

WBP: Ewing Miller is a little critical of Ralph Tucker because he said that one of the key factors in keeping economic vitality in downtown area was traffic flow and that he thought that Ralph didn't actively seek federal . . . he didn't seek more interchanges off Interstate 70 in addition to the interchange at U.S. 41 and I-70. How would you respond to that?

GETTINGER: I would say the city of Terre Haute. And I'm not talking about the mayor. I'm talking about the people uptown. I hate to use the word, "the establishment" /but it/ was afraid that people would

GETTINGER: leave Terre Haute and go someplace else to shop or trade. I don't think they realized the potential of /Interstate/ 70. I don't think anyone ever sold them the need of access to the highway. I don't think they understood. Just like they don't understand the value of the navigation on the Wabash River. They don't realize, and they didn't realize then. So it lacked the spark of something. One man could have made that difference! Think about it. There's three exits -- one 'way over there in West Terre Haute that goes nowhere. /It is/ just a way to get on and get off at that exit. And you have so much more traffic (laughing) on it than they ever dreamed of. They'll have to rebuild the road.

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: And the other one clear out there. And so help me if it hadn't have been for the fact that they had the airport and Rose Polytechnic's out there, you know, and Tony's house was out that way (the farm), they wouldn't ever have took a second look at that. Terre Haute would have ended up maybe with one.

(both laugh heartily)

It could have happened that way.

WBP: Yes.

So you're critical, too, of the people of Terre Haute?

GETTINGER: Well, I just think that they haven't realized their great potential. And then you see people who live in a place . . .

WBP: You have . . . you did receive support from some of the people. I mean, for instance, Maynard Wheeler was supportive of your efforts with the Wabash . . .

GETTINGER: Listen. We got support from a lot of people in Terre Haute. One time I had better than 300 members of the Wabash Valley chapter up there. But we didn't have outstanding leadership. That . . .

WBP: They were followers rather than leaders?

GETTINGER: I'd say this is kind of what we had everywhere. And there is such a thing as timing. And we hadn't been in business long enough to be organized in such a way to have timing. Now, our program of navigation of the Wabash River was timed fairly well. But at the same time, the Tennessee Tom Bigbee was figured in the same pattern. We would produce more freight from Terre Haute to the Ohio River on the Wabash River and to the Ohio River system, four to one over what they will on the Tennessee Tom Bigbee.

WBP: Huh.

GETTINGER: But the four governors in the area covered by the Tennessee Tom Bigbee were all on a white horse ridin' to Washington, goin' in and sitting down, talking to their congressmen and their senators and the president of the United States. And they moved out in front of us. But we couldn't get a governor in town, see.

/Governor/ Roger Brannigan appeared and /Governor/ Matthew Welch were the two people who appeared in Washington. We never was able to get anyone except Otto Kerner in the state of Illinois to come to Washington and testify to the need of flood control.

So we didn't have, really, the political muscle that was required by the establishment, in reality. But if you look at what we did accomplish . . .

WBP: Well, you had Birch Bayh from Terre Haute.

GETTINGER: Right.

WBP: Was he helpful?

GETTINGER: Yes, Birch Bayh was helpful. Vance Hartke was helpful. But you've built in the last 20 years, the Salamonie, the Mississinewa, the Huntington, the Monroe, the Patoka, the Mansfield The only reservoir we had in Indiana or in the Wabash Valley was Cagles Mill.

WBP: When you started?

GETTINGER: Yes. So you've made it possible to create enough water reserve at the present time to make navigation possible well above Terre Haute and have enough low flow to support it. These other places that have had water, they've had enough water on the Tennessee Tom Bigbee for 30 years before we ever started on a reservoir system.

I say we didn't have the howling, yelling support, but we had honest support and more people support than any other organization in this whole country of ours.

WBP: But you didn't have the right support?

GETTINGER: Well, it was really the right support, but not the recognized established support.

WBP: I see.

GETTINGER: We didn't have the /J.7 Irwin Millers, see. In Columbus. We didn't have those people. We didn't have Eli Lilly off their duff, see. And yet there's nothing that Eli Lilly could not have done. We had fine support from the plant up at Clinton where they was realizing and accepting

GETTINGER: the use of the water out of the upstream reservoirs.

WBP: But you couldn't get management, top management at Lilly's to . . .

GETTINGER: It was just we had no contact. They never moved, see. And part of it was our fault . . . part of it. Sure, but whenever you stop and think about the support and you think about 6500 people spending \$10 a year to support an organization that all we had in this world was a hope and a prayer and a belief, my good friends, you've got to say that's a hell of a lot of people spending \$10 every day just because. And they were the right people because they were "John P. Public" people.

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: And the average person on the street was the guy that made the Wabash Valley Association. And that's why it was effective. And we got a lot done but we ought to have got a lot more done for the good of the valley. And this would have been so meaningful.

WBP: It's still there though. I mean there's still something to work with now that future generations have. It's there permanently. It won't . . .

GETTINGER: That's the reason we're keeping the Wabash Valley Association organized and keeping a board of directors and keeping an office. And we recognize the fact that today there is no way. Only to furnish an outlet for coal in this valley and jobs for people. And if and when we get a governor in these two states in Illinois and Indiana that are really concerned about bringing in industry and mayors like Pete Chalos here in Terre Haute, who knows that if he's going to have jobs for his people, he's going to have to have

GETTINGER: someplace for them to work. Some of these days you'll get enough of those folks together to bring it about. But it's going to take that kind of dedication. It's going to have to be for a purpose of doing something and the biggest purpose there is lays in this coal development.

Why this power plant over here /In view across a field and a lake to the southeast of the Gettinger back yard/ uses three million tons a year!

WBP: They have their own mine, right? Right there?

GETTINGER: Well, they haven't yet, but they're going . . . somebody's going to have to sink a mine. And they'll belt it in. /There'll/ be no transportation cost or nothing else. They'll just go down and get it.

WBP: Right where they are?

GETTINGER: Yes. Yes.

WBP: I thought it looked like they might have a shaft over there now or a

GETTINGER: This is a part of . . . it hasn't been developed yet. But it's needed one there.

But you know that they're not going to pay transportation charges in to this area from the Freeman's mine south of Springfield, Illinois, or from Amax /with/ the costs and overloads rising as they are, that somebody some of these days has to sink a shaft that can produce three million tons of coal . . . maybe two shafts, maybe 1600 people working, to furnish coal for that one plant.

WBP: Now, you're not talking about stripping either; you're talking about . . .

GETTINGER: No, I'm talking about deep shaft mines. Deep shaft mines. After it's all said and done, I expect by the time you run everything by -- stripping operation versus a deep mine system today -- I expect, honestly, the difference in the cost of the two products would be so close with the new modern technology you have in coal mines -- in the new mines. I think economics will bring it about.

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: See, all of this coal out of the Wyoming area has about half of the B.T.U. value that this coal has. They've got every modern device known to remove sulphur from this coal. Now, if they wasn't going to use this kind of coal, then why in the world did they put all the money in that?

WBP: Yeah.

GETTINGER: It has to start this way. I don't regret the time and the work. In fact, I'm awfully proud of having the opportunity to be a part of what has happened in developing the river. We need to do more in soil conservation work in both states in the Wabash valley, and we will continue to need /to do this/. Because we'll keep changing farming methods. And we'll keep using advanced technology which will create more erosion problems and more soil problems. So we need to continue our study and our management of the water and the land all over the Wabash basin.

WBP: Yeah.

I know it's against your principles really to criticize people and to bemoan your situation, but

WBP: who . . . what groups of people were your biggest opponents in the Vigo County -- Terre Haute area in terms of development, industrial and economic development?

GETTINGER: I don't think we had any opposition in all the city of Terre Haute. I think everybody wished us well. I say that freely. I don't recall over two or three people in Terre Haute who I never saw any kind of movement have as much universal acceptance of the man on the street as the developing of the Wabash River. I've had dozens of people who'd come into the Wabash Valley Interstate Commission, off the street, and say, "Hope you get this river done." "Hope you get navigation." "Hope you clean it out." I never was accosted by anyone in Terre Haute that was just honestly against the principle. There's nothing politically . . . in the state of Indiana there's never as big a myth as the vote power of the opposition. Never was. Here's John Myers. /He/ has done anything and everything that he wanted . . . that he could do, see, for the development of the river. A Republican in an area that was normally . . . in Terre Haute, he's carried Terre Haute numerous times. And he's carried my county. And the only reason John Myers has done that is because he's for navigation and he's for management of the waters of the Wabash river basin.

WBP: Yeah.

GETTINGER: /He/ was one of the early members, before he ever ran for congress while he was a bank teller up at Covington. He bought his membership and said why haven't you come to see me sooner, see?

Birch Bayh was one of the original incorporators, see, of the Wabash Valley Association.

WBP: I see.

GETTINGER: And the newspaper blowed clear out of proportion what the opposition was. It was something different. Like a murder, it got on front page. Yet there's only one person /who/ got murdered out of how many in this state? And they break their necks to do that. And newspapers and the television and the news media have broke their necks about talking about opposition to everything! We lived in that period. And I don't blame them. That's what people was wanting to hear, something bad. They talk so . . . folks don't listen to something good. It's always something bad. Now, we've gone through that stage, and maybe we're on the uphill stage of being glad to hear something that's good.

WBP: Yeah. Well, of course, part of politics -- particularly in Indiana -- is you run against something rather than run for something. Right?

GETTINGER: Oh, that's been us! That's been us in this great Hoosier state of ours. And why we are that way, I don't know. I wish we weren't. But I'd say that would be one of the things we'd change . . . /unintelligible/.

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: I don't know how much . . . I've just tried to level with you what we've talked about and thought about. I don't know what you expected me to say.

WBP: Sure, this is fine. This is extremely valuable, I think.

Well, of course, you can never There was a mystique surrounding Tony Hulman. He seemed to be bigger than life and everybody held him somewhat in awe. I met him and showed him through a historic house that he had given the /Vigo County/ Historical Society at one point.

WBP: And because he had accomplished so much, people expected a great deal out of him. And I suppose people who wanted to get things done hoped to have his support. Was he a supporter of your . . .

GETTINGER: Tony Hulman was my good friend. The only thing on earth we ever had in common was the Wabash River. I never asked him to come to participate in a meeting that he didn't come to. Now, Tony was just a good guy, and I think they ought to have that on his tombstone. He wished everybody kind of well. He put off arriving at a decision as long as he could. ~~/He/~~ didn't want to make anybody mad at him. He's what we'd all like to be. Nobody likes to take issue. Some people think I enjoy it. But so help me, I'd lots rather have everybody downtown like me (laughs), you know. And I think this is true of everybody. And Tony accomplished that.

WBP: Um hm.

GETTINGER: And I think it's a great example. But he could finance it. He was set up in a business. Then he made some lucky steps. That Speedway ~~/The Indianapolis Motor Speedway/~~! Maybe he visualized what could be done with it. I don't know. But my old friend Joe Quinn had an awful . . . he was a dreamer, you know. And he worshipped and loved Tony. And he did an awful lot of that promotion work in the beginning. But that was down Joe's alley. There was only one Joe Quinn, see. And that was his field.

WBP: O.K.

What about the long-term influence of labor-management conflict? The position of, say, the coal mine owners versus the miners. Do you think that this had an effect on the Wabash valley which perhaps meant that . . . well, I don't . . . well,

WBP: let me just stop there.

GETTINGER: No. Go right ahead.

WBP: You tell me.

GETTINGER: Go ahead and finish the rest of that story.

WBP: Well . . . (laughs) which may have meant that the power elite -- or the economic elite -- of the community or the area was a bit more conservative.

GETTINGER: Well, you can turn it this way. The railroad was king when the mines were here. And what you're asking me, had that changed when we talked about water transportation? It was a slight factor. Some people imagined that this would open up a coal market for somebody in Kentucky in some non-union mine. I heard that remark once in my lifetime, only once. The area . . . you see this area we're in of the Wabash Valley is /the/ home of John L. Lewis.

WBP: Where was his home?

GETTINGER: Well, he was born up in Minnesota or Wisconsin or someplace like that. But he done all his working in the Illinois mines.

WBP: Oh, he did? I see.

GETTINGER. And he started the union in . . . tried to start it over that way. And he come across the river into Knox County and Greene County and Clay County and Sullivan County and Vigo and Vermillion. And here's where he started sellin' members, and here's where he had an effective organization. And that's how for years the United Mine Workers' national headquarters was at Indianapolis, Indiana. /It/ was because John L. Lewis had a full lunch pail from this area.

GETTINGER: Now, that was a shock. Eugene Debs was a labor leader. And Eugene Debs did a tremendous lot of things and was a great man in his time. And we needed the Eugene Debs and the contribution that he made to the world is /the envy/ of anybody who's striving. But at the same time, there were people that said, "Well, there's John L. Lewis; there's Eugene Debs in this area." They forget how our social contribution was to the world and held off spending money in some manner in this particular area. You see right where we're sitting, we're right in the heart of an area that had a greater complex in the year of 1910 than Gary, Indiana.

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: And we were started off as an industrial center.

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: And it was . . . we were just . . . I don't know. Because of a few things that didn't quite happen, they passed us by kind of like on the highway at night.

WBP: But again, was there animosity? Or a desire to protect one's own property?

GETTINGER: I think there was a fear built up by the capitalistic system. I think the bankers entered into this field in an indirect way, because they had to make the financial judgment of where the plants go and where can you have less trouble. And I think the fact that these people came from this particular area was a handicap.

WBP: For John L. Lewis and Eugene V. Debs?

GETTINGER: Yes. Yes.

WBP: The bankers in New York and bankers in Indianapolis and . . .

GETTINGER: Bankers in New York that stem from Chicago. We don't live far away from Chicago to see how they lived, and Chicago wanted the business, and they wanted it there. And I think that entered into the picture more than anything else, really.

 And they still haven't realized the potential of this area. They still don't understand it. How do you get that job done? I don't know. Terre Haute has been handicapped on account of that.

WBP: Do you know of any conscious efforts by the people who were employers in Terre Haute to keep wage rates as low as possible? And perhaps they thought they could do that best by not bringing in other industry?

GETTINGER: Ooooh, I've heard that story. I heard that story about Sullivan, about Vincennes, about Mount Carmel, Illinois, and Lawrenceville. And I never found any industry that hasn't been moved pretty well in this area, have you?

WBP: No.

GETTINGER: Pfizer's came here. I don't know whether . . . have they ever lost any days on account of labor trouble?

WBP: Not that I know of.

GETTINGER: Well, I don't either.

WBP: There may have been a . . . well, I don't know.

 But from my knowledge of current labor-management relations, things are pretty good. We had a coal strike just recently but they come

WBP: periodically. And we're having a newspaper strike up in Terre Haute. But, by and large, CBS doesn't even have a union. They're the largest employer up there. I don't think there are any major . . . I don't think that labor is a problem, really, now.

GETTINGER: I don't think there's any finer labor anywhere in any area -- given area -- that anyways near produces and is as easy to get along with and work with as the people in the Wabash valley.

WBP: O.K. But since the . . .

GETTINGER: I can say that honestly. I told . . .

WBP: It seems to me then that the employers in the Wabash Valley are the people who know that best, and the bankers in the Wabash Valley are the people that know that best. Since the outside bankers and large industry doesn't seem to be aware of that, then it's up to these local ones, if they want to grow, if they want to bring in and want to change, to take the leadership. And again, we're right back where we were.

GETTINGER: This would be ideal. There's no question about what the financial institution does. And there's a willingness among the bankers of the area. But again, we lack that one spark plug to move it along and start it down the road. I can't help but think about Robert Green Construction Company. Now, Bob taught school at this little school at Graysville. He coached basketball over there after he married his wife, who was Tom Durham's daughter. You passed the sand road this morning.

WBP: Um hm.

GETTINGER: And so Bob was more or less kind of an adopted Sullivan Countian. He was born and reared down

GETTINGER: here at Freelandville. He and Mary Agnes started that construction company with the help of her father on just a dream and a prayer. Every dollar they've made, they've made themselves. And at one time had the national record in paving in the whole country. One of the biggest dirt-moving contractors in the whole United States, at one time.

WBP: They're located where? Vincennes?

GETTINGER: At Vincennes, and operates Executive Inn there. And Mary Agnes, his wife, runs it. Still works at it every day. And just the most congenial, the finest people in the whole valley. And every dollar he's made, he's made right out of this area, see. Started from here and here . . . here's a sample. If Bob had applied himself to the development of the Valley or someone like this and some banks like this, this river will be navigable in the next 20 years. I think whether he comes along or whether he doesn't, I think the dire necessity of transportation will bring it about. But at the same time, how much help it would be if somebody would just emerge and move in and start working at it, helping it.

WBP: To summarize what you've been saying, is what you're saying that as the automobile age dawned and we went away from the steam engine and railroads to trucks -- trucking along the interstate highways -- the cost of transportation was such that any community that can compete using a lower cost mode of transportation such as river transportation, was going to be in a better position and . . .

GETTINGER: And they have been all along.

WBP: . . . and they have been.

GETTINGER: That's why Owensboro's outgrown Terre Haute two to one.

WBP: I see.

GETTINGER: All right.

WBP: Owensboro, Kentucky?

GETTINGER: Yes. Just take a look at it.

WBP: Now . . . are you saying also now that the facilities are available along the . . . the reservoirs are available along the Wabash River to keep that river level high enough so that it could float barge traffic all year round?

GETTINGER: Yes, at Terre Haute, Indiana.

WBP: Without dredging?

(pause)

GETTINGER: I think that it has to be a mixed program. I think there's places in the Wabash River that has to be dredged, not for navigation but for the general welfare of the area and the farmer people who live in the area to control that water level. But I think dredging is the cheapest way on earth of doing it. I know all the hullabaloo there is about dredging. But it's still the cheapest flood control there is in the world and until we open these streams up, until we create channels that take care of the water when we have floods and rain, you're not going to have any kind of flood control. It's the number one thing in flood control. Not levees! We need the levees only to take care of the emergencies. But the everyday flow of water has to be managed by a channel, and we need to improve channel, channel, channels in every watershed there is in the state of Illinois and Indiana.

WBP: Even the Mississippi River has to be . . .

GETTINGER: Oh, yes! And the only way to control soil erosion is soil management. All this has to go together.

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: If you have a complete unit. The soil erosion on the Ohio River is tremendous, because not much thought has been given until recent years. See, we started in the Wabash Valley Association talking about land management in order to keep the dirt out of the streams.

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: In this state of Indiana alone we had better than a 130 public-qualified 66 watershed applications filed. And then the opposition moved in. And with the lack of moneys and so forth and how many of them died on the vine? Better than a hundred of them. See? But we still have more watersheds in the state of Indiana than any other state that borders us, including the great state of Kentucky with all the so-called expertism in water management. They still haven't done the job in soil management that we have in Indiana.

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: And our people have been responsible for that. That didn't come out of a state agency. That come out of people's desires to do something about it. And that's an off-fall of this great number of people we had in the Wabash Valley /Association/. And the amount of good that we've done in soil erosion alone in this valley and the working with the soil conservation people, as well as the Corps of Engineers, has been the thing that's done the real good over the long pull.

WBP: I keep thinking back to

What about Don Foltz? Has he been active in the Wabash Valley Association?

GETTINGER: Don has always been a member in the Wabash Valley Association. As you know, Don was . . . headed up the Department of Natural Resources which we had to have in the state of Indiana. And they had to change the direction of that department. And Don did the best job of reorganizing of the department that anyone ever done. As a public servant, he's without . . . there's no one that would try to do it the way he sees it -- be it right or be it wrong -- than Don Foltz. He has convictions and they're good convictions. They're honest convictions because they're his convictions. Don's interest in water and soil management has always been a sincere, honest realization that this was good and that this was what we ought to do. And in order to survive as a nation, this we have to do. Yes, Don Foltz is a real believer.

WBP: I see. O.K. Good.

GETTINGER: And he's like me. He's hard to live with, because he does believe, see. And it doesn't matter where the . . . (laughs) somebody takes a poke at Don, to heck with you. (continuing laughter) But he's a great character. He's a fine person. He'd like to . . . he believes. You see he believes in the future of this town and he . . .

WBP: If you were going to . . . do you have any other people on your list of people you want to mention in a list of people who are believers and who are potential, perhaps leaders in this kind of a movement.

GETTINGER: Oh, my land. I'd have to start 'way down at Ed Culley in the New Albany area.

WBP: Ed Culley?

GETTINGER: Uh-huh. And I'd come up the river and I'd . . .

WBP: Is that C-u-l-l-y?

GETTINGER: C-u-l-l-e-y, used to be county agent here, and he's a farmer down there now. I think of Henry Wallace at Crossville, Illinois, a man who cements pipe to pipe salt water and oil wells. /He/ doesn't own an acre of land, but honestly believes that water is the solution to all evils and all problems almost.

And Ted Johnson in the little town of Maumee, a man that's almost 80 years old. For 20 years he's been to every meeting I've ever had. Lives close to the river.

But honestly, honestly believe . . . J. Roy Dee at Mount Carmel /has/ been dead 10 years or something like that, maybe 15, but he honestly believed that water was a necessity. We cleaned up the streams from the salt water and things in the state of Illinois early . . . in /19/63. Got a real water program working over there before water pollution was then dreamed of. No national pressure, no nothing. Just pressure of the people in the state of Illinois and Indiana against that water going into the river. We never received one ounce of publicity about that. But that was because of people like Charlie French at Fairfield, Fred Bruce at Fairfield, (pause) oh, when you start namin' them, you know, you have . . . you forget so many, so many people that did so much. Here's Mr. Piper across the river here. Art Lodge, president of the Second National Bank at Robinson, was

GETTINGER: one of the first directors of the Wabash Valley Association when we had no members. Earl Allen of Palestine, Bob Grammelspecher, Arthur Norbett down at Jasper, Dennis Hincke, Ted Hincke, his father, the people who believed in control of the waters of the Patoka river. Stanley Dumes at Vincennes, Irving Schenck and Irving Schenck's father, Charlie Schenck, who is a member of the legislature. It's impossible to name all the people that have been and contributed . . . take Bill Johnson from our county, who /Senator Richard/ Lugar just recently appointed as director of the A.S.C.S. office.

WBP: That's A.S. . . .

GETTINGER: A.S.C.S. office -- Agricultural Stabilization Committee for the State of Indiana -- executive officer of the agency. Lives down here below Merom Bluff, has bottom land, has been concerned ever since we've started. Carl Mintsger over here west of Graysville. There's just no way to name. Carl Hale of Terre Haute, a farmer down south. You see when you get into this you name . . . that you think of people . . . it's just impossible to name the people that have been involved, that have done so much to bring about the understanding that has taken place that the way to solve our problem is to honestly do something about land and water matters.

WBP: The most progressive presidents . . .
Presidential administrations in this regard have been which ones in your experience?

GETTINGER: Well, the thing is that the governor really has more to do with it than the president.

WBP: Congress has to allocate funds, don't they?

GETTINGER? Allocate the funds, I . . .

WBP: Perhaps we should focus on senators or congressmen.

GETTINGER: Well, you still come back to the fact that the state generally has more to do with it. The governor's office is the starting of it. A governor who is really concerned in the state of Indiana, that honestly moved it began with /Former Governor/ Matthew Welch in reality.

Now, Matt lived in Vincennes. He knew what the floodwaters did. /Former Governor/ Roger /Branigan/ followed him and contributed. John Mitchell was the head of the Department of Natural Resources /and/ is a real believer in water management and soil management. He realizes what it could . . . what it would honestly do if we would as a state manage the waste and just save the waste alone that's caused by flooding.

WBP: Have the Republicans been as active as the Democrats?

GETTINGER: In the Wabash Valley Association, it never made any difference whether they were Republicans or Democrats. Take Wishard Myers up at Veedersburg. A groceryman, a farmer. John's brother, in fact. John Myer's brother. He was on my commission -- /The Wabash Valley/ Interstate Commission. Nobody over . . . see it's been 1957 and this is 1981. That's been a long pull for some of them.

WBP: That's right.

GETTINGER: And to think of the dedication that has come from this, it's just almost unbelievable.

WBP: If you were going to name your successor as the spark plug of this, who would you name?

GETTINGER: We've been looking for him. There's a wonderful opportunity for somebody to come into this

GETTINGER: organization and do the things that would be natural to do -- just the things that's right and the things that's good. That's all they have to do in the Wabash Valley is just sit down and analyze what's costing us the most every year. What does it cost to lose a ton of soil off a field? In a flood pool? What did this 3-1/2 inch rain we had Tuesday week ago . . . how much did it honestly cost the merchant in Sullivan to have that farmer lose that ton of soil?

WBP: That's it. Those are concrete terms. That's a good way of presenting it.

GETTINGER: This is the thing that they really would . . . they've got to want to do something about the future. And this is the greatest opportunity I know of in this world. I only regret that we didn't get as much accomplished as I hoped to get accomplished. But it's just . . . when I sit down and look back at all those things that's happened since 1960. And in this valley I list the accomplishments; I list rural unorganized organization known as the Wabash Valley Association. How much they honestly contributed and how much they pioneered all over the country. There wasn't another organization in the whole United States that had as many just grass-roots members that was contributing to it as we had.

WBP: Where are the records of this organization?

GETTINGER: At Terre Haute.

WBP: From its founding?

GETTINGER: At Terre Haute.

WBP: Do you have an office there now?

GETTINGER: Yes.

WBP: Where's it located?

GETTINGER: On Ohio Street, there at the . . . where the
radio station is.

WBP: WTHI?

GETTINGER: Uh-huh.

WBP: In that same building?

GETTINGER: No, no. W . . .

WBP: WBOQ?

GETTINGER: There by Mace's.

WBP: Oh, WAAC.

GETTINGER: Yes. Upstairs there.

WBP: It's upstairs there.

GETTINGER: Uh-huh.

WBP: Does somebody man that office or does . . . ?

GETTINGER: On practically every Monday there's a man who
works part-time for the Wabash Valley Association
there and . . .

WBP: What's his name?

GETTINGER: Don't ask me . . . (laughs) Oh, Sam . . .
Sam . . . Sam . . . by gosh.

WBP: Oh, well.

GETTINGER: He's executive director and he comes over to
the office on Monday. And I suppose we ought to
move the office down at Fairfield where it would
be handy to him.

WBP: Do you have a complete set of records there from the beginning?

GETTINGER: Oh, yes. Now it's been . . . there're not as packed maybe as they ought to be.

WBP: Sure.

GETTINGER: But they're there and the . . . we've kept everything intact as well as we could, but really we . . . Well, for a spell after Maynard Wheeler died . . . Maynard was kind of herding it for a while, indirectly. He'd drop in the office every day or two and we . . . After he passed away, why we didn't have anybody else that took the responsibility and took it on their shoulders and assuming it.

This Maynard Wheeler was an unusual person. He wanted to get things done. And even to his dying day, he was just . . . the last days on this earth he was looking ahead. I think one of the great men Terre Haute's produced has been Maynard Wheeler. What he wanted to do to Terre Haute was unlimited. He picked up . . . in retirement he started helping me with . . . see, I was at the Wabash Valley Interstate Commission. We weren't supposed to do any selling. I was working for the State. We were supposed to be . . . you know a commission is never appointed with a purpose of doing anything. It's appointed because of the honor and the glory.

WBP: (chuckles)

GETTINGER: Any commission form of government is terrible. Your hands are tied on both sides. You can't do anything because the governor might not like it or you can't do anything because the governor of Illinois might not like it. And you just kind of have to . . . I don't understand how I got along as long as I did. Because I did go out and helped

GETTINGER: . . . tried to help people understand what the Wabash Valley Association is about. It wasn't the Interstate Commission that took the lead. It was the Association that took the lead.

WBP: All right.

GETTINGER: And that's rightfully so. That's where government is based -- at the grass roots.

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: And as long as you have that kind of direction, any agency that touches you is going to do what the people want done, not what some person wants done!

WBP: Yes.

GETTINGER: And I came back here

END OF SIDE 1

TAPE 2-SIDE 2

GETTINGER: . . . the value of the Wabash Valley Association. Wishard Myers come to Washington to talk to me about it and assured me that we'd have that kind of a operation. I wasn't going to ask him back there and just sit down and wonder what we was going to do. We was going to do something. And I had no desires of getting old in Washington. It's a terrible place to get old. And I was awful thankful and awful glad to come back to the work in the Wabash Valley. And I appreciate that opportunity. I appreciate the governor of Indiana who knew of my politics and I came back, see. There was no question about my political beliefs. Everybody knows that. And yet Governor /Otis/ Bowen was most helpful. And as far as being water conscious as to our problems in the southern part of Indiana, I don't think he honestly realized the

GETTINGER: damage of floods. I don't think he ever realized the need of city water and community water and water for people. Because he came from an area where he lived where they had lakes. They had water that was easy to get with wells, and pollution hadn't been a great problem to them in that area.

WBP: Um hm.

GETTINGER: And this is something you ought to be born with kind of to understand how meaningful it is and how far your tax dollar goes. See, there's never been any money invested in a watershed project by the Soil Conservation Service that hasn't paid for itself double in considering the amount of soil that it saves.

WBP: The Tennessee Valley Authority is something of an example of what can be done.

GETTINGER: Isn't that something? And it's a measure . . . and you see they haven't really . . . they have done an awful lot, but they've only scratched the surface. And that's the same thing that you can say about the Wabash Valley Association. There's more work needs to be done in this valley today than we've ever done, and there will be when I'm dead and when you're gone, too.

WBP: It's basically what? Organizational work, isn't it? It's mobilizing . . . trying to mobilize people - have meetings, get them together, get them to write letters . . .

GETTINGER: Well, yes.

WBP: It's like a political campaign to some extent except it goes on all year round, every year, year in and year out.

GETTINGER: Yes, it's a good thing. And good things are awful hard to keep in front of the public. Like churches. It's the nearest to religion and belief of anything I know of. If we could find someone who had always wanted to be a minister that would just . . . would love to do something that . . .

WBP: It's a cause.

GETTINGER: Uh-huh. Pleasing to his God and so forth. It's a great challenge for them. And I know there's someone around that would love to do that if we could just find him. But it's not many people that want to cast their lots this way. And you're never going to get rich working for the Wabash Valley Association. And we put all of our premiums on getting rich. That's the criteria whether you're good or bad, how many dollars you've got.

WBP: Yeah. And . . .

GETTINGER: Not what you leave as a heritage to the future. And this is a hard thing for people to admit, but it's the truth so God bless me. You know, just one of those things. The sense of values have got to change in this country.

WBP: Well, it's been this way for a long time.

GETTINGER: (laughs heartily) But this is the influence that you have to buck when you go to Washington. You need that help, and there's so much selfishness involved in government, the same as everywhere else. And there's so many priorities, but I think we've passed the period of doubting and believing that we have a sufficient amount of water. I think we've seen the cost of not having water and what it does for communities that don't have it. There's no way to have . . . the only reason why we have Eli Lilly . . .

WBP: Is because of water.

GETTINGER: . . . at Clinton is the fact that releases from the Salamonie and the Mississinewa and the Huntington and Mansfield puts enough water in that river that we could compete with the waters of Tennessee where they was figuring on going.

WBP: Is that right?

GETTINGER: And when they found out about it, that was the difference of that plant moving to Clinton, Indiana, and moving down into Tennessee where they originally planned for it to go.

WBP: That's right. That's fascinating.

This past summer . . . or this past winter I guess, New York City almost ran out of water. Didn't it?

GETTINGER: That's right.

WBP: Almost ran out of water in New Jersey and New York City and New England.

GETTINGER: And all of those states, Boston itself, had water problems. And when you stop and think about what they think when something like that comes down the main stem in the morning and what the state government and the governor of that state of Massachusetts, which has never thought about having water problems, see. They've done very little about it. See, in the eastern states, it's been accepted. The only . . . after you get this side of Pennsylvania, there's very, very few water projects. Very few. And Pennsylvania has always been water-minded. And Pennsylvania's done a tremendous job in this field as a government.

WBP: Yeah.

GETTINGER: But then you get into Ohio, the biggest thing that Rhodes has done is continue the water program.

GETTINGER: The thing he'll be remembered for in the state of Ohio has been the fact that he's moved ahead. You see we have completed an 8-million-dollar study on the Wabash River Basin on how the water ought to be developed, done by the Corps of Engineers, the Soil Conservation Service, both states' departments of natural resources, Purdue University, Illinois University -- all involved in this study. And it has been completed. It was supposed to be done in three years; it took eight years to do it. And we honestly have a plan. And it's as good as any plan in the world. But it isn't worth a damn until it's executed. Paper work is fine, but unless you can get a governor in the governor's office in Indiana and a governor in the office of Illinois, you're not going to bring it about. And the people demand it. It's just this simple. And that's why the Wabash Valley Association is trying to cause people to become so motivated that a governor would feel like if he's going to be a good governor, he's got to please a majority of the people. Let's close that.

WBP: Yeah.

Thank you very much, Mr. Gettinger.

GETTINGER: (laughs)

WBP: This has been a delightful interview. I'm glad to have had the opportunity to come and talk with you today.

GETTINGER: Well, it's been a pleasure working with you. You have a nice personality and a nice attitude.

WBP: Thank you.

END OF TAPE

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